linear alkyl residues differing from the R residue by at least 2 carbon atoms, phenyl, naphthyl or biphenyl residues and a cyclohexyl residue.

18 An acylated cellobiose according to any one of claims 1, 11 or 15 wherein the major fraction and preferably at least 90% of the acylated cellobiose is the α anomer.

19 An acylated cellobiose according to any one of claims 1, 11 or 15 wherein the major fraction and preferably at least 90% of the acylated cellobiose is the β anomer.

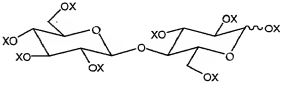
20 An acylated cellobiose according to any one of claims 1, 11 or 15 wherein not more than 50% of the Z residue represents H.

21 An acylated cellobiose according to claim 20 wherein not than 25% of the Z residue represents H.

22 An acylated cellobiose according to claim 1 which is selected from cellobiose heptanonanoate monobenzoate, cellobiose heptanonanoate mononaphthanoate, cellobiose heptanonanoate monoethanoate, and cellobiose heptanonanoate monocyclohexanoate.

23 An acylated cellobiose according to claim 1 which is selected from cellobiose heptadecanoate monobenzoate, cellobiose heptadecanoate monobiphenyloate, cellobiose heptadecanoate monoethanoate, and cellobiose heptadecanoate monocyclohexanoate.

24 A method for preparing an acylated cellobiose according to claim 1 comprising the step of reacting an acylated cellobiose having general formula 2:



in which X represents an acyl group (R-CO-) or H, being not more than a minority of X residues and R represents a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched chain hydrocarbon residue containing from 5 to 31 carbon atoms with an acylating agent containing a residue R' as described in claim 1 preferentially at the anomeric carbon of the cellobiose.

25 A method according to claim 24 characterised by first reacting cellobiose with an acylating agent containing a residue R as described in claim 1 in an amount such that a majority of hydroxyl substituents in the cellobiose are acylated, including the hydroxyl group at its anomeric carbon atom, secondly, at least

partially deacylating the product of the first step at the anomeric carbon in the cellobiose and

thereafter in a third step reacting the product of the second step with an acylating agent containing the residue R'.

26 A method according to claim 24 wherein the acylating agent employed for acylating at the anomeric carbon is an acid chloride or carboxylic acid anhydride or carboxylic acid/strong acid anhydride catalyst.

27 A method of thickening or structuring a water-immiscible liquid to form a cream, soft solid or solid comprising the steps of forming a solution of a gellant in the water-immiscible liquid at a temperature above its gelling temperature and thereafter cooling the solution to and maintaining it at below its gelling temperature until its viscosity has increased or until it has solidified wherein the gellant comprises an acylated cellobiose (CHME) as specified in any of claims 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15 or 17.

28 A cream, soft solid or solid composition comprising a water-immiscible liquid structured or thickened by an effective amount of a gellant in which the gellant comprises an acylated cellobiose (CHME) as specified in any of claims 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15 or 17.